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SUBJECT: MILF WELCOMES REGULAR DIALOGUE WITH US EMBASSY

REF: 05 MANILA 5372

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: In a second meeting with poloffs, Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Vice Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jafaar confirmed that MILF-GRP negotiations for a political settlement will begin after both parties sign a written agreement on ancestral domain, and noted that the MILF is now also seeking the endorsement of imprisoned Moro National Liberation Front leader Nur Misuari for the GRP-MILF peace process. He explained that the MILF had already established a "parallel government" within Muslim communities throughout Mindanao, but cited needs for capacity building for the governance of a future "Bangsamoro homeland" and for the implementation of a comprehensive peace pact. These will require assistance from the international community, he emphasized. The MILF wants to expand the membership and role of the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) once an agreement is signed. Jafaar offered discreet assistance in bringing to justice wanted terrorists and terrorist financiers. Our dialogue can be useful in holding out the prospect for US assistance in the wake of a GRP-MILF agreement in support of peace and development, thereby isolating more radical elements within the MILF. It will remain important that the MILF continues to take steps to distance itself from terrorism. End Summary.

No Timetable for MILF

¶2. (C) On April 18, poloffs met for the second time (reftel described initial meeting in November 2005) with MILF Vice Chairman for Political Affairs Ghazali Jafaar and MILF member Abu Dubaya at the MILF's Peace Negotiations Headquarters in Sultan Kudurat City, Maguindanao Province, Mindanao. Jafaar welcomed a regular dialogue with the U.S. Embassy and expressed keen interest in receiving U.S. assistance for post-conflict Mindanao. Jafaar identified the next steps in the MILF-GRP peace process as the signing of a written agreement on ancestral domain, after which negotiations would begin for a political settlement to the decades-old conflict.

¶3. (C) Jafaar did not give any MILF timetable for this process. According to Jafaar, the MILF will only sign a pact that contains provisions acceptable to the MILF Central Committee. In addition to ancestral domain, Jafaar cited

governance and "nationality" as subjects that still required clarification.

Seeking Misuari's Endorsement

¶4. (C) Jafaar also explained that the MILF is now seeking the endorsement of former Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) leader Nur Misuari, currently on trial in Manila, for the MILF-GRP peace process. Talks are underway between the MILF and MNLF to arrive at "common solutions" to "issues" that could affect future MILF-MNLF relations, he added. While these discussions continue to focus on "unity," an organizational reunification is not possible, according to Jafaar. Jafaar said the MILF's main objective was to ensure broad support for a peace agreement. (Septel will describe the views of Cotabato City Mayor and member of the MNLF Council of Fifteen Muslimin Sema on Nur Misuari and developments within the MNLF.)

Need for International Assistance

¶5. (C) The MILF has already established its own "parallel government" within Muslim communities throughout Mindanao, Jafaar admitted, including representatives from all sectors of society, such as business, farming, and fishing. Jafaar noted that MILF leaders at all levels are now discussing how best to prepare themselves for the transition from conflict to peace. Capacity building for MILF leaders will be critical to govern effectively a future "Bangsamoro

MANILA 00001747 002 OF 002

homeland;" the international community, including the USG, should play a helpful role in this regard, he urged. Jafaar also stressed the importance of having a "credible international organization" to monitor the implementation of an agreement after signature, pointing to what he described as the GRP's failure fully to implement its 1996 agreement with the MNLF.

Expansion of the IMT

¶6. (C) Jafaar expressed satisfaction with Malaysia's role -- especially the Malaysian-led International Monitoring Team (IMT) -- in the GRP-MILF peace process, noting that the IMT had been instrumental in reducing the number of skirmishes on the ground. Jafaar said that, once an agreement is signed, the MILF Central Committee wants the IMT not only to remain in Mindanao but to take on an expanded role -- including economic development -- and expand its membership, such as from the European Union.

¶7. (C) Jafaar also expressed support for the MILF-GRP Ad Hoc Joint Action Group (AHJAG), headed on the GRP side by Armed Forces of the Philippines Brigadier General Mohammad Bin Dolorfino. He claimed that the AHJAG had already been very successful in kidnapping cases and continues to play an important role in reinforcing the MILF-GRP ceasefire. He promised to provide a recent report detailing AHJAG's activities.

Will the MILF Splinter?

¶8. (C) When asked about the potential of the MILF splintering over a peace agreement with the GRP, Jafaar dodged the question, saying that "every organization that practices democracy will experience disagreement." According to Jafaar, MILF members who have different opinions are eventually "persuaded" through a process of discussion.

Targeting Terrorists

¶9. (S/NF) Poloffs noted that top Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Abu Sayyaf (ASG) leaders had relocated from Central Mindanao to the Sulu Archipelago in November 2005, and expressed the hope that this was indeed at the instigation of the MILF leadership. They strongly emphasized that the MILF still needed to do more to demonstrate that even "elements" within the MILF had cut their ties with terrorist organizations, including financiers. Jafaar carefully noted this point, and promised to provide discreet assistance.

COMMENT

¶10. (C) This second meeting was informal, relaxed, and limited to only two members of the MILF leadership. Jafaar was clearly interested in engaging in a regular ongoing dialogue with the Embassy. We will proceed on an ad hoc basis, and perhaps next expand to include representatives from USAID and RSO, as long as we continue to see signs that the MILF is further distancing itself from terrorism and terrorist elements, and engaging in good faith negotiations with the GRP. Our discussions can be useful in holding out the prospect for US assistance in the wake of a GRP-MILF agreement in support of peace and development, thereby isolating more radical elements within the MILF.
Kenney